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Viewing cable 08SANJOSE129, COSTA RICA RECOGNIZES PALESTINIAN "STATE"

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SANJOSE129	2008-02-19 15:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Jose

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-12/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2711772.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2707705.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2707712.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-10/Investigacion/NotasSecundarias/Investigacion2707716.aspx>

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9446
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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 0232
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0041
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0014
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0048
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0017
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0769

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 000129

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2018

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SUBJECT: COSTA RICA RECOGNIZES PALESTINIAN "STATE"

Classified By: Classified by ADCM David E. Henifin per 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Costa Rica recognized the "state" of Palestine in an exchange of notes in New York on February 5. The MFA quietly announced the move in San Jose hours later, taking local diplomatic missions (including Post) by surprise. The MFA,s public explanation stressed Costa Rica,s and the Palestinians, shared commitment to the "purposes and principles" of the UN Charter, and described the recognition as part of the Arias administration,s overall effort to broaden contacts with Arab nations. Privately, MFA contacts insisted (somewhat defensively) that Costa Rica had taken a "sovereign, independent" decision, that President Arias had been personally involved, that the intent was to push the Peace Process forward, and that the decision reflected "more balanced policy" in the Middle East.

The Israeli Embassy has protested the move, and canceled GOI-GOCR UNSC consultations/political dialogue planned for February 26. In our view, the GOCR,s decision brings little tangible benefit to either side (or the Peace Process), but it is in keeping with Arias,s goal of maintaining the broadest possible diplomatic relations. The no-notice, no-consultation way this decision was announced is also in keeping with the foreign policy decision making style of this second Arias administration. END SUMMARY.

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NO-NOTICE RECOGNITION ANNOUNCEMENT
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¶2. (SBU) On February 5, GOCR Permrep Jorge Urbina exchanged notes in New York with Palestinian representative Riyad Mansour, formalizing Costa Rica,s recognition of the "state" of Palestine. The MFA in San Jose issued a release eight hours later confirming the news, which came as a complete surprise to most local diplomatic missions (including Post).

¶3. (U) The MFA,s statement (emailed to WHA/CEN) and companion media interviews by FonMin Bruno Stagno stressed Costa Rica,s and the Palestinians, "common support and commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law." The MFA statement continued that the recognition "deepens our gradual normalization of diplomatic relations with the Arab and Islamic world in general, as part of a foreign policy of opening borders and mind, which reinforces Costa Rica,s intelligent engagement with the world." The statement closed with a list of the 16 nations or entities -- eight in the Middle East -- with which the Arias administration had established relations since 2006. These include Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, "Palestine," and Yemen. The MFA also announced that the GOCR would establish a "political consultation mechanism" with the Arab League. The announcement attracted little media coverage (the MFA seemed to play it down deliberately).

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MFA EXPLAINS, CLARIFIES (AND DEFENDS)
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¶4. (SBU) As soon we heard the news, we sought clarification. MFA Director of Foreign Policy Christian Guillermet confirmed that the GOCR had deliberately recognized the "state" of Palestine, but he seemed uncomfortable saying any more, adding that only Stagno or his COS, Antonio Alarcon, could discuss the issue in detail.

¶5. (C) On the margins of a UNSC issue briefing to the Diplomatic Corps on February 8 (during which Stagno said nothing about Palestine), Guillermet further explained to us privately that a) the GOCR had taken a "sovereign,

independent" decision to recognize the "state" of Palestine; b) President Arias had been personally involved in the decision; and c) the GOCR,s intent was to push the Middle East Peace Process forward. When pressed, Guillermet said the GOCR was willing to protect Israel,s interests as well, but he maintained that the recognition of Palestine reflected Costa Rica,s new, "more balanced policy" in the Middle East, which contrasted with its "more one-sided" (i.e., more strongly pro-Israel) approach in the past. Guillermet offered no specifics as to how Palestinian recognition would move the Peace Process forward, however. Somewhat defensive, he insisted that Costa Rican recognition of Palestine was no different from USG support for Kosovo independence.

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ISRAELIS SURPRISED (AND INCENSED)
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16. (C) On February 12, Israeli Ambassador Ehud Eitam (protect) called on Charge and Pol/C to discuss the Palestinian issue. (Eitam had alerted us to the recognition on February 5, a few hours before the MFA statement was released.) Still fuming, Eitam recounted how the GOI,s permrep in New York suspected that the GOCR may have been planning something when GOCR Permrep Jorge Urbina referred to the "state of Palestine" in recent remarks. When Eitam approached the MFA for clarification on February 4, Guillermet dismissed the idea as an earlier proposal that had not been followed up. When Stagno called Eitam the next day to alert the GOI, it was clear to the Israeli that the recognition decision had already been made. In response, Eitam said the GOI immediately canceled the UNSC consultations/political dialogue planned for February 26 in San Jose. The Israeli Vice FonMin was to have lead that delegation.

17. (C) When he protested to Stagno under instructions from Jerusalem, Eitam heard an explanation similar to Guillermet,s. The GOCR believed that recognition would help the Peace Process, by among other things, now enabling Costa Rica to press the newly-recognized Palestine to live up to its international obligations. Tacitly acknowledging that the announcement had stung Israel, Stagno promised Eitam that this would be "the last surprise" in Costa Rican-Israeli relations, although he added that San Jose and Jerusalem would not always be in agreement on UNSC or UN issues. (Eitam had just taken up his new post here in August 2006 when the GOCR announced that it was moving its embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.) NOTE: True to Stagno's comments to Eitam, the MFA did issue a statement on February 11 condemning the latest round of rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip on the Sderot area. Although it received little media attention, this is the first such statement we can recall from during the Arias administration.

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COMMENT
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18. (C) The Israeli Ambassador theorizes that Costa Rica,s puzzling recognition decision must have been a quid pro quo for Palestinian support of Costa Rica,s UNSC election. This may be true, but we can see little practical benefit for either side. Stagno has already told the media that the MFA lacks the funds to open an embassy in the Palestinian territories. (In fact, the GOCR has only opened one embassy -- in Beijing -- in the 16 countries/entities recognized thus far by the Arias administration.) We suspect that the Palestinians are similarly unable to open anything in San Jose. The move thus remains mostly symbolic, but is in keeping with President Oscar Arias,s goal of Costa Rica maintaining diplomatic relations with the broadest possible array of nations. The way this decision was announced is also in keeping with the major foreign policy moves in this second Arias administration. Like the 2006 embassy move from Jerusalem and the 2007 recognition of China, Arias and Stagno acted quickly, without coordinating broadly within the MFA, with little/no public notice, and without truly

consulting all the interested parties in advance.
BRENNAN